

January 18, 2007
Easter Seals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain
4400 Central Avenue
Great Falls, MT 59405-1641

Madame Chairwoman and members of the committee, my name is Michelle Belknap, President and CEO of Easter Seals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain, whose corporate headquarters are in Great Falls (PH: (406/761-3680).

I am here today to talk about the affect that the development disabilities rate redesign had on our organization.

While we support the Department's goals in this change and feel strongly that individuals with disabilities should have a choice of providers, we have some concerns from going through this process. The rate for day services needs to be such that it will cover the varying schedules of the people we serve. Since we cannot bill for services when clients are not in attendance, we were unable to bill for our full contracted amount, yet our staffing costs continued at usual levels. We need to keep staffing levels consistent in order to keep our long term committed and qualified staff, especially in this time of very low unemployment.

The people we serve do not adjust well to changes in staffing, not to mention the reduced level of quality that high turnover brings with it.

For the first year of the pilot project, we saw our revenues reduced by \$150,000. This is even with the receipt of I-149 dollars. We were the only organization in the pilot to suffer a reduction in revenue from prior years. We were also the only provider in the pilot that has only day services.

Therefore, we respectfully ask that you support the Department's request of \$30 million which was arrived through a diligent process between the Department and providers and was supported by cost data from all providers.

The proposed reduction to the Departments request may reduce the choices for people with disabilities, as service providers will not have the funds to expand services and may erode the existing quality that is so important to the states most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.